

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

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1. A system for processing information associated with a package handled by a shipping service provider in connection with delivery of the package to an intended recipient, comprising:

10 an order-receiving system operative to receive a customer-entered order to ship a package from an Internet accessible computer system and communicate said customer-entered order to a dispatch system;

15 a dispatch system responsive to receipt of said customer-entered order for generating a dispatch order for pick up of the package; and

a communication system for communicating said dispatch order to a selected service person,

20 whereby the selected service person, in response to receipt of the dispatch order, picks up the package for delivery via the shipping service provider to the intended recipient.

2. The system of claim 1, further comprising a communications receiving device used by the selected service person for receiving the dispatch order.

3. The system of claim 1, further comprising a package information processing component associated with the order-receiving system for processing information entered by the customer via the Internet accessible computer system and validating the information prior to generating the dispatch order.

4. The system of claim 1, wherein the order to ship a package is an on call order for the shipping service provider to pick up the package at a place selected by the customer and deliver the package to the intended recipient.

5. The system of claim 1, wherein the order to ship a package is an order for the shipping service provider to pick up the package at a drop box.

6. The system of claim 1, wherein the order-receiving system is operative to provide predetermined print label indicia to the customer's Internet accessible computer

system for printing a label for affixation to the package, the label including predetermined authenticity indicia.

5 7. The system of claim 6, wherein the order-receiving system is operative to provide the print label indicia in response to validation of information input by the customer via the Internet accessible computer system.

10 8. The system of claim 7, wherein the order-receiving system is operative to accepts information from the label during scanning of the label on call pickup or when processed at a drop box.

15 9. The system of claim 1, further comprising a package shipment status information system operative for receiving status information corresponding to the status of shipment of the package and for providing the status information for access by the customer.

20 10. The system of claim 9, wherein the status information comprises tracking information corresponding to the package.

11. A method for processing information associated with a package handled by a shipping service provider in connection with delivery of the package to an intended recipient, comprising:

5 receiving a customer-entered order to ship a package from an Internet accessible computer system and communicating the customer-entered order to a dispatch system;

at the dispatch system, generating a dispatch order for pick up of the package; and

10 communicating the dispatch order to a selected service person,

whereby the selected service person, in response to receipt of the dispatch order, picks up the package for delivery via the shipping service provider to the intended recipient.

15 12. The method of claim 11, further comprising the step of receiving the dispatch order with a communications receiving device used by the selected service person.

20 13. The method of claim 11, further comprising the step of processing information entered by the customer via the Internet accessible computer system and validating the information prior to generating the dispatch order.

14. The method of claim 11, wherein the order to ship a package is an on call order for the shipping service provider to pick up the package at a place selected by the customer and deliver the package to the intended recipient.

15. The method of claim 11, wherein the order to ship a package is an order for the shipping service provider to pick up the package at a drop box.

16. The method of claim 11, further comprising the step of providing predetermined print label indicia to the customer's Internet accessible computer system for printing a label for affixation to the package, the label including predetermined authenticity indicia.

17. The method of claim 16, wherein the step of providing the print label indicia is in response to validation of information input by the customer via the Internet accessible computer system.

18. The method of claim 17, further comprising the step of accepting information derived from label indicia

obtained by scanning a label affixed to the package on call pickup or when processed at a drop box.

5 19. The method of claim 11, further comprising the step of storing status information corresponding to the status of shipment of the package and providing the status information for access by the customer.

10 20. The method of claim 19, wherein the status information comprises tracking information corresponding to the package.

21. A system for pick up of a package by a shipping service provider for delivery of the package to an intended recipient, comprising:

an Internet accessible computer system for allowing a customer to enter an order to ship a package to an intended recipient;

an order-receiving system operative to receive a customer-entered order from said Internet accessible computer system and communicate said customer-entered order to a dispatch system;

a dispatch system responsive to receipt of said customer-entered order for generating a dispatch order for acquisition of the package;

a communication system for communicating said dispatch order to a selected service person; and

a communications receiving device used by the selected service person for receiving the dispatch order,

whereby the selected service person, in response to receipt of the dispatch order, acquires the package for delivery via the shipping service provider to the intended recipient.

22. The system of claim 21, wherein the order to ship a package is an on call order for the shipping service provider to acquire the package at a place selected by the customer and deliver the package to the intended recipient.

23. The system of claim 21, wherein the order to ship a package is an order for the shipping service provider to acquire the package at a drop box.

24. The system of claim 21, wherein the dispatch system comprises a dispatch center responsive to receipt of said customer-entered order for determining whether a pickup point associated with said customer-entered order is within a predetermined service area for demand pickup by a selected service person and, in response to a determination that the pickup point is within the predetermined service area, generating the dispatch order for communication to the selected service person.

25. The system of claim 24, wherein the dispatch system is operative for determining whether a pickup point associated with said customer-entered order is within a predetermined service area for demand pickup by a selected

service person and, in response to a determination that the pickup point is not within the predetermined service area, providing information to the customer about locations for package drop-off.

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26. The system of claim 24, wherein dispatch system is operative for validating that pickup service is available for the order by reference to a zip code associated with the customer.

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27. The system of claim 21, further comprising a delivery information acquisition device (DIAD) for scanning a label on the package to acquire information about the package.

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28. The system of claim 21, wherein the communication system for communicating said dispatch order is selected from the group comprising: an e-mail message delivery system, a cellular telephone system, a pager system, a wireless personal communication system (PCS), an ARDIS network, Bluetooth devices, or other proprietary data communications system.

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29. The system of claim 21, further comprising a printer associated with the Internet accessible computer system operative for receiving predetermined print label indicia from the order-receiving system and printing a label for affixation to the package, the label including predetermined authenticity indicia.

30. The system of claim 29, wherein the predetermined authenticity indicia are machine readable.

31. The system of claim 29, wherein the predetermined authenticity indicia are recognized by the order-receiving system as indicative of prepaid shipping, and cause the order-receiving system to accept information from the label and process the package for shipment.

32. The system of claim 31, wherein the order-receiving system is operative to accept information from the label during scanning of the label at on call pickup or when processed at a drop box.

33. The system of claim 21, further comprising a package shipment status information system operative for receiving status information corresponding to the status of shipment of the package by the customer and for providing the status information for access by the customer.

34. The system of claim 33, wherein the status information system provides status information to the customer via the Internet accessible computer system.

35. The system of claim 33, wherein the status information comprises the shipping history of a predetermined number of prior package shipments by the customer.

36. The system of claim 33, wherein the status information comprises package tracking information.

37. The system of claim 21, further comprising a payment system associated with the order-receiving system for receiving payment information from the customer and processing a customer payment for shipment of the package.

38. The system of claim 21, wherein the order-receiving system is operative to provide a shipping information interface via an Internet site, the shipping information interface being accessible by the customer's Internet accessible computer system and including shipment order information fields for customer entry of shipment order information associated with shipment of the package.

39. The system of claim 38, wherein the shipment order information fields are prepopulated with customer profile information retrieved from a customer profile information database associated with the order-receiving system.

40. The system of claim 38, wherein the shipment order information fields are prepopulated with information from a prior shipment selected from a display of prior shipments by the customer at the customer's Internet accessible computer system.

41. The system of claim 38, wherein the customer's Internet accessible computer system includes a customer address book containing a plurality of pre-entered selectable addresses of intended recipients, and wherein the customer creates the shipping order by accessing the shipping information interface and populating the shipment order information fields of the shipping information interface by selection of an address from the customer address book.

42. The system of claim 38, wherein the shipment order information fields include a "ship from" address field that can be filled in by the customer with information indicative of an address different from the regular shipping address associated with that customer, whereby a customer such as a traveling salesperson can ship a package from a location other than the customer's regular place of business.

43. The system of claim 38, wherein the shipping information interface is operative to allow a customer to access functions of the order-receiving system selected from the group comprising: view shipping history, track a shipment, use similar shipment to process a new shipment, void a shipment, reprint a label, reprint a receipt, view or edit profile information, view or

edit an address book, set or change shipping or payment preferences, or change a password.

5 44. The system of claim 38, wherein the shipment order information fields include a “request package pickup” field that can be selected by the customer to cause the order-receiving system to generate the customer-entered on call order, or deselect the request package pickup field, whereby a customer can select on call pickup or alternatively select to
10 deliver the package to a drop box.

45. The system of claim 38, wherein the shipment order information fields include a “ship to” address field that can be filled in by the customer with information
15 indicative of an address of the intended recipient.

46. The system of claim 45, wherein the “ship to” address field is populated with information entered manually by the customer, from an address book stored associated with
20 the customer, or from information from a prior shipment by the customer.

47. The system of claim 46, further comprising an address validation component operative for processing the ship to address field and determining whether an address of a package recipient is a valid address, and further operative for providing an indication of address invalidity in the event that the address of the package recipient is invalid.

48. The system of claim 21, wherein the order includes an information field indicative of a pickup time for the package by the shipping service provider.

49. The system of claim 21, wherein the order-receiving system comprises an Internet world wide web (WWW) server.

50. The system of claim 49, wherein the WWW server is operative for generating a web interface for interaction by the customer's Internet accessible computer system.

51. The system of claim 21, wherein the order-receiving system is operative to provide a request package pickup interface via an Internet site, the request package pickup interface being accessible by the customer's Internet accessible

computer system and including package pickup information fields for customer entry of package pickup information associated with shipment of the package.

5 52. The system of claim 21, wherein the order-receiving system is operative to provide a shipment summary interface via the Internet site, the shipment summary interface being accessible by the customer's Internet accessible computer system and including editable shipment summary information fields associated with an order to ship a package.

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53. The system of claim 52, wherein the shipment summary interface is operative to display service options for selection by the customer selected from the group comprising: changing information associated with shipment of the package, adding another package to the shipment, selecting to view a drop-off locator, and selecting service for delivery of the package sooner.

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20 54. The system of claim 21, wherein the order-receiving system is operative to provide a payment interface via the Internet site, the payment interface being accessible by the customer's Internet accessible computer system and including

selectable payment options associated with an order to ship a package.

5 55. The system of claim 54, wherein the payment options are selected from the group comprising: payment from a customer's existing account with the shipping service provider, payment via credit card on file with the shipping service provider, and payment via other credit card.

10 56. The system of claim 54, wherein the order-receiving system is operative, in response to selection by the customer of a payment option, to confirm the payment option selected by the customer and further process the order in response to confirmation of the payment option.

15 57. The system of claim 56, wherein the order-receiving system is operative, in response to confirmation of the payment option, to provide a print labels interface via the Internet site, the print labels interface being accessible by the
20 customer's Internet accessible computer system and including instructions for printing a label for association with the package.

58. The system of claim 21, wherein the order-receiving system is operative to provide a shipping history interface via the Internet site, the shipping history interface being accessible by the customer's Internet accessible computer system and including shipping history information fields for allowing customer selection of shipping history display options.

59. The system of claim 58, wherein the order-receiving system is operative to display shipping history information to the customer in response to selection of a shipping history display option.

60. The system of claim 58, wherein the shipping history display options include a track shipment option, and wherein the order-receiving system is operative to display shipment tracking information associated with a selected prior order by the customer in response to selection of the track shipment option.

61. The system of claim 58, wherein the shipping history display options include a "ship again" option, wherein the order-receiving system is operative to display information associated with a selected prior order by the customer, and

wherein the order-receiving system is operative to use information from the selected prior order to process a new shipment order in response to customer selection of the ship again option.

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62. The system of claim 58, wherein the shipping history display options include a "shipment details" option, wherein the order-receiving system is operative to display information associated with at least one prior order by the customer, and wherein the order-receiving system is operative to display detailed information associated with a selected prior order of the customer in response to selection of the shipment details option in association with selection of a particular prior order.

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63. The system of claim 62, wherein the shipment details options include information selected from the group comprising: viewing a receipt for a selected prior shipment, reprinting a receipt for a selected prior shipment, reprint a label for a selected prior shipment, and tracking a package from a selected prior shipment.

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64. The system of claim 21, further comprising a customer profile information system associated with the order-receiving system, the customer profile information system storing preference information associated with the customer.

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65. The system of claim 64, wherein order-receiving system is operative to display a shipping order interface on the customer Internet accessible computer system, the shipping order interface including information fields for customer entry of information associated with an order to ship a package, and wherein the information fields are pre-populated with customer profile information from the customer profile information system.

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66. A method for delivery of a package by a shipping service provider to an intended recipient, comprising the steps of:

5 receiving an order entered by a customer at an Internet accessible computer system to ship a package to an intended recipient;

communicating the order to an order-receiving system;

10 at the order-receiving system, processing the order to validate information associated with the order;

in response to validation of information associated with the order, communicating the order to a dispatch system;

15 at the dispatch system, generating a dispatch order for pick up of the package,

communicating the dispatch order to a selected service person;

receiving the dispatch order at a communications receiving device associated with the selected service person;

20 in response to receipt of the dispatch order, acquiring the package,

whereby the selected service person, in response to receipt of the dispatch order, picks up the package for delivery to the intended recipient.

67. The method of claim 66, wherein the order to ship a package is an on call order for the shipping service provider to pick up the package at a place selected by the customer and deliver the package to the intended recipient.

68. The method of claim 66, wherein the order to ship a package is an order for the shipping service provider to pick up the package at a drop box.

69. The method of claim 66, further comprising the steps of:

determining whether a pickup point associated with the order is within a predetermined service area for demand pickup by a selected service person and,

in response to a determination that the pickup point is within the predetermined service area, generating the dispatch order for communication to the selected service person.

70. The method of claim 69, further comprising the steps of:

determining whether a pickup point associated with the order is within a predetermined service area for demand pickup by a selected service person, and

in response to a determination that the pickup point is not within the predetermined service area, providing information to the customer via the Internet accessible computer system about locations for package drop-off.

71. The method of claim 69, further comprising the step of validating that pickup service is available for the order by reference to a zip code associated with the customer.

72. The method of claim 66, further comprising the step of acquiring information about the package by scanning a label on the package with a delivery information acquisition device (DIAD).

73. The method of claim 66, wherein the step of communicating the dispatch order is carried out by communicating a message via a technology selected from the group comprising: an e-mail message, a cellular telephone system, a pager system, a wireless personal communication

system (PCS), an ARDIS network, Bluetooth devices, or other proprietary data communications system.

5 74. The method of claim 66, further comprising the steps of:

 communicating predetermined print label indicia from the order-receiving system to the customer's Internet accessible computer, and

10 locally printing a label corresponding to the print label indicia for affixation to the package, the label including predetermined authenticity indicia.

 75. The method of claim 74, wherein the predetermined authenticity indicia are machine readable.

15 76. The method of claim 74, wherein the predetermined authenticity indicia are recognized by the order-receiving system as indicative of prepaid shipping, and further comprising the steps of accepting information from the label at
20 the order-receiving system and processing the package for shipment.

77. The method of claim 76, further comprising the step of accepting information from the label in response to scanning of the label during on call pickup or when processed at a drop box.

78. The method of claim 66, further comprising the steps of:

receiving status information from a package delivery system corresponding to the status of shipment of the package by the customer, and

providing the status information to the customer.

79. The method of claim 78, wherein the status information is provided to the customer via the Internet accessible computer system.

80. The method of claim 78, wherein the status information comprises the shipping history of a predetermined number of prior package shipments by the customer.

81. The method of claim 78, wherein the status information comprises package tracking information.

82. The method of claim 66, further comprising the steps of:

receiving payment information from the customer,

and

processing a customer payment for shipment of the package.

83. The method of claim 66, further comprising the step of:

providing a shipping information interface via an Internet site, the shipping information interface being accessible by the customer's Internet accessible computer system and including shipment order information fields for customer entry of shipment order information associated with shipment of the package.

84. The method of claim 83, further comprising the step of prepopulating selected shipment order information fields with customer profile information retrieved from a customer profile information database.

85. The method of claim 83, further comprising the step of prepopulating selected shipment order information

fields with information from a prior shipment selected from a display of prior shipments by the customer at the customer's Internet accessible computer system.

5 86. The method of claim 83, wherein the customer's Internet accessible computer system includes a customer address book containing a plurality of pre-entered selectable addresses of intended recipients, and wherein the customer creates the shipping order by accessing the shipping
10 information interface and populating the shipment order information fields of the shipping information interface by selection of an address from the customer address book.

15 87. The method of claim 83, wherein the shipment order information fields include a "ship from" address field that can be filled in by the customer with information indicative of an address different from the regular shipping address associated with that customer,

20 whereby a customer such as a traveling salesperson can ship a package from a location other than the customer's regular place of business.

88. The method of claim 83, wherein the shipping information interface is operative to allow a customer to access functions of the order-receiving system selected from the group comprising: view shipping history, track a shipment, use similar shipment to process a new shipment, void a shipment, reprint a label, reprint a receipt, view or edit profile information, view or edit an address book, set or change shipping or payment preferences, or change a password.

89. The method of claim 83, wherein the shipment order information fields include a "request package pickup" field that can be selected by the customer to cause the order-receiving system to generate the customer-entered on call order, or deselect the request package pickup field,

whereby a customer can select on call pickup or alternatively select to deliver the package to a drop box.

90. The method of claim 83, wherein the shipment order information fields include a "ship to" address field that can be filled in by the customer with information indicative of an address of the intended recipient.

91. The method of claim 90, wherein the “ship to” address field is populated with information entered manually by the customer, from an address book stored associated with the customer, or from information from a prior shipment by the customer.

92. The method of claim 90, further comprising the steps of:

processing the ship to address field to validate the ship to address,

determining whether an address of a package recipient is a valid address, and

providing an indication of address invalidity in the event that the address of the package recipient is invalid.

93. The method of claim 66, wherein the order includes an information field indicative of a pickup time for the package by the shipping service provider.

94. The method of claim 66, wherein the order-receiving system comprises an Internet world wide web (WWW) server.

95. The method of claim 94, wherein the WWW server is operative for generating a web interface for interaction by the customer's Internet accessible computer system.

5 96. The method of claim 21, further comprising the step of:

providing a request package pickup interface via an Internet site, the request package pickup interface being accessible by the customer's Internet accessible computer system and including package pickup information fields for customer entry of package pickup information associated with shipment of the package.

10 97. The method of claim 66, further comprising the step of:

15 providing a shipment summary interface via the Internet site, the shipment summary interface being accessible by the customer's Internet accessible computer system and including editable shipment summary information fields associated with an order to ship a package.

20 98. The method of claim 97, wherein the shipment summary interface is operative to display service

options for selection by the customer selected from the group comprising: changing information associated with shipment of the package, adding another package to the shipment, selecting to view a drop-off locator, and selecting service for delivery of the package sooner.

99. The method of claim 66, further comprising the step of:

providing a payment interface via the Internet site, the payment interface being accessible by the customer's Internet accessible computer system and including selectable payment options associated with an order to ship a package.

100. The method of claim 99, wherein the payment options are selected from the group comprising: payment from a customer's existing account with the shipping service provider, payment via credit card on file with the shipping service provider, and payment via other credit card.

101. The method of claim 99, further comprising the steps of:

in response to selection by the customer of a payment option, confirming the payment option selected by the customer, and

processing the order in response to confirmation of the payment option.

102. The method of claim 101, further comprising the steps of:

in response to confirmation of the payment option, providing a print labels interface via the Internet site, the print labels interface being accessible by the customer's Internet accessible computer system and including instructions for printing a label for association with the package, and printing a label for affixation to the package.

103. The method of claim 66, further comprising the step of:

providing a shipping history interface via the Internet site, the shipping history interface being accessible by the customer's Internet accessible computer system and including shipping history information fields for allowing customer selection of shipping history display options.

104. The method of claim 103, further comprising the steps of:

displaying shipping history information to the customer in response to selection of a shipping history display option.

105. The method of claim 103, wherein the shipping history display options include a track shipment option, and further comprising the step of displaying shipment tracking information associated with a selected prior order by the customer in response to selection of the track shipment option.

106. The method of claim 103, wherein the shipping history display options include a "ship again" option, and further comprising the steps of:

displaying information associated with a selected prior order by the customer, and

utilizing information from the selected prior order to process a new shipment order in response to customer selection of the ship again option.

107. The method of claim 103, wherein the shipping history display options include a "shipment details" option, and further comprising the steps of:

5 displaying information associated with at least one prior order by the customer, and

displaying detailed information associated with a selected prior order of the customer in response to selection of the shipment details option in association with selection of a particular prior order.

10 108. The method of claim 107, wherein the shipment details options include information selected from the group comprising: viewing a receipt for a selected prior shipment, reprinting a receipt for a selected prior shipment, reprint a label for a selected prior shipment, and tracking a package from a selected prior shipment.

15 109. The method of claim 21, further comprising the step of storing preference information associated with the customer in a customer profile information system.

20 110. The method of claim 109, further comprising the steps of:

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prepopulating the information fields with customer profile information from the customer profile information system.

111. A method for shipping a package from a shipping service provider's customer to an intended recipient, comprising the steps of:

5 receiving a customer-entered order to ship a package from an Internet accessible computer system operated by a customer;

validating shipping information associated with the customer-entered order;

10 in response to validating the shipping information, communicating printer indicia to the customer at the Internet accessible computer system such that the customer is enabled to print a label for affixation to the package, the label containing predetermined label shipping information;

15 acquiring the package from the customer;

scanning a label affixed to the package to obtain the label shipping information from the label on the package; and

20 delivering the package to the intended recipient in accordance with the shipping information entered by the customer and label shipping information obtained from the label affixed to the package.

112. The method of claim 111, wherein the step of scanning the label is carried out at the point of acquisition of the package.

5 113. The method of claim 111, further comprising the step of obtaining a payment from the customer for shipping the package, and wherein the validating step includes validating the payment.

10 114. The method of claim 112, wherein the step of receiving the payment from the customer comprises receiving credit card payment information from the customer.

15 115. The method of claim 111, further comprising the steps of:

in response to customer selection of an on call pickup option via the Internet accessible computer system, generating a dispatch order for pick up of the package; and

20 communicating the dispatch order to a selected service person,

whereby the selected service person, in response to receipt of the dispatch order, picks up the package for delivery via the shipping service provider to the intended recipient.

116. The method of claim 115, further comprising the step of receiving the dispatch order with a communications receiving device used by the selected service person.

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117. The method of claim 111, wherein the step of acquiring the package comprises picking up the package at a place selected by the customer.

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118. The method of claim 111, wherein the step of acquiring the package comprises picking up the package at a drop box.

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119. The method of claim 111, further comprising the step of accepting information derived from scanning label indicia on the label affixed to the package at on call pickup or when processed at a drop box.

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120. The method of claim 111, further comprising the step of storing status information corresponding to the status of shipment of the package and providing the status information for access by the customer.

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$\mathbb{R}^{n \times n}$ and $\mathbb{R}^{n \times n}$ are the sets of $n \times n$ real matrices and $n \times n$ real symmetric matrices, respectively. \mathbb{R}^n is the set of n -dimensional real vectors. \mathbb{R}^n_+ is the set of n -dimensional nonnegative real vectors. \mathbb{R}^n_{++} is the set of n -dimensional positive real vectors. \mathbb{R}^n_{++} is the set of n -dimensional positive real vectors. \mathbb{R}^n_{++} is the set of n -dimensional positive real vectors.

122. A method for facilitating customer creation of a label for use on a package to be delivered by a shipping service provider from a customer to an intended recipient, comprising the steps of:

5 obtaining shipping information from a customer corresponding to an order to deliver a package via an Internet accessible computer system operated by the customer;

validating the shipping information received from the customer;

10 in response to validating the shipping information, communicating print label indicia to the customer at the Internet accessible computer system, the print label indicia including predetermined authenticity indicia, ship to address indicia, and level of service indicia.

15 123. The method of claim 122, wherein the label is printed by a customer using the print label indicia at a printer associated with the Internet accessible computer system.

20 124. The method of claim 122, wherein the authenticity indicia are machine readable.

125. The method of claim 122, wherein the predetermined authenticity indicia are recognized by an order-receiving system of the shipping service provider as indicative of prepaid shipping.

126. The method of claim 122, wherein the validating step includes the step of receiving a payment from the customer.

127. The method of claim 126, wherein the step of receiving a payment from the customer comprises receiving a credit card payment.

128. The method of claim 122, wherein the validating step includes validating the address of the intended recipient.

129. The method of claim 122, wherein the label includes regions selected from the group comprising:

a return address region for containing information corresponding to a return address of a package sender;

a ship to address region for containing information corresponding to a destination address of an intended recipient for the package;

5 a number of packages region for containing information corresponding to the number of packages contained in a shipment of a plurality of packages;

10 a machine readable encoded region for containing text of the label and other package information in a form readable by an optical scanning device operated by a person associated with the shipping service provider;

a human readable sort code region for containing information relating to identification of a hub and sortation belt of automated packaged handling equipment associated with the shipping service provider;

15 a second machine readable region)containing a postal code for the destination address of the intended recipient for reading by optical scanning equipment operated by a person associated with the shipping service provider;

20 a level of service indicating region for containing information corresponding to a selected level of service provided by the shipping service provider and associated with the package;

a tracking number region for containing information corresponding to a tracking number associated with the package, the tracking number including an indicium identifying the number as a tracking number, a customer account number, a level of service indicator corresponding to the level of service indicated in the level of service indicating region, and a predetermined reference number determined by the shipping service provider;

a third machine readable region for containing the information of the tracking number region in a machine readable format for reading by optical scanning equipment operated by a person associated with the shipping service provider; and

a type of billing indicator region for containing information corresponding to a type of billing for the shipment service provided by the shipping service provider.

130. The method of claim 122, wherein the authenticity indicia comprises human readable identifying indicia associated with the shipping service provider, and is located in a predetermined identifying indicia region.

131. The method of claim 122, wherein the step of printing the label comprises using a print function associated

with an Internet browser computer program on a personal computer operated by the customer.

132. The method of claim 131, further comprising the steps of:

displaying information corresponding to selected regions of the label in an Internet browser computer program window opened when the customer accesses an Internet-accessible computer shipping system operated by the shipping service provider.

133. The method of claim 131, further comprising the steps of:

automatically formatting a printer for landscape orientation for the label, which is folded in half after printing to form a complete label,

whereby the label is receivable in a standard plastic window for an adhesive plastic label provided by the shipping service provider.

134. The method of claim 122, further comprising the steps of:

querying the customer's Internet accessible computer to determine a browser type, and

providing a page setup command to cause proper printing of the label for a determined type of browser.

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135. The method of claim 122, wherein the authenticity indicia comprises indicia for enabling personnel of the shipping service provider to recognize that the label is authentic, the authenticity indicia comprising:

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a billing prepaid indicator region for containing information indicating that the shipment service provided by the shipping service provider has been prepaid; and

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a predetermined identifying region for containing identifying indicia associated with the shipping service provider.

136. A method for delivering a package by a shipping service provider from a customer to an intended recipient, comprising the steps of:

communicating printer indicia to a customer via an Internet connection for printing a label remotely from the shipping service provider, the printer indicia comprising at least machine readable indicia containing shipping information encoded thereon and authenticity indicia;

scanning the machine readable indicia on a label affixed to the package at the point of acquisition of the package to obtain the shipping information encoded on the label;

verifying the authenticity of the label at the point of acquisition of the package by reference to the authenticity indicia on the label; and

in response to verifying the authenticity of the label, introducing the package into the shipping service provider's package handling systems for delivery of the package.

137. The method of claim 136, wherein the step of verifying the authenticity of the label comprises visual inspection of the label for the presence of predetermined identifying indicia associated with the shipping service provider.

138. The method of claim 136, wherein the step of verifying the authenticity of the label comprises processing the machine readable indicia to verify that the label includes the predetermined authenticity indicia.

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139. The method of claim 136, further comprising the steps of:

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obtaining shipping information from the customer corresponding to an order to deliver the package via an Internet accessible computer system operated by the customer;

validating the shipping information received from the customer;

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in response to validating the shipping information, communicating print label indicia to the customer at the Internet accessible computer system, the print label indicia including the predetermined authenticity indicia.

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140. The method of claim 139, wherein the label is printed by a customer using the print label indicia at a printer associated with the Internet accessible computer system.

141. The method of claim 136, wherein the predetermined authenticity indicia are recognized by an order-

receiving system of the shipping service provider as indicative of prepaid shipping.

142. The method of claim 139, wherein the validating step includes the step of receiving a payment from the customer.

143. The method of claim 142, wherein the step of receiving a payment from the customer comprises receiving a credit card payment.

144. The method of claim 139, wherein the validating step includes validating the address of the intended recipient.

145. The method of claim 136, wherein the label includes regions selected from the group comprising:

a return address region for containing information corresponding to a return address of a package sender;

a ship to address region for containing information corresponding to a destination address of an intended recipient for the package;

a number of packages region for containing information corresponding to the number of packages contained in a shipment of a plurality of packages;

5 a machine readable encoded region for containing text of the label and other package information in a form readable by an optical scanning device operated by a person associated with the shipping service provider;

10 a human readable sort code region for containing information relating to identification of a hub and sortation belt of automated packaged handling equipment associated with the shipping service provider;

15 a second machine readable region)containing a postal code for the destination address of the intended recipient for reading by optical scanning equipment operated by a person associated with the shipping service provider;

a level of service indicating region for containing information corresponding to a selected level of service provided by the shipping service provider and associated with the package;

20 a tracking number region for containing information corresponding to a tracking number associated with the package, the tracking number including an indicium identifying the number as a tracking number, a customer

account number, a level of service indicator corresponding to the level of service indicated in the level of service indicating region, and a predetermined reference number determined by the shipping service provider;

5 a third machine readable region for containing the information of the tracking number region in a machine readable format for reading by optical scanning equipment operated by a person associated with the shipping service provider; and

10 a type of billing indicator region for containing information corresponding to a type of billing for the shipment service provided by the shipping service provider.

146. A method for verifying the validity of a shipment of a package from a package sender to an intended recipient via a shipper service provider, comprising the steps of:

communicating predetermined printer indicia to the package sender, the printer indicia operative for enabling the printing of a customized label on a printer coupled to a computer system associated with the package sender, the customized label including predetermined machine readable security indicia;

prior to processing the package for shipment, reading the machine readable security indicia on the customized label with a reading device associated with the shipping service provider;

verifying the machine readable security indicia with a verifying device associated with the shipping service provider; and

in response to detection of invalid security indicia with the verifying device, indicating the package as invalid.

147. The method of claim 146, further comprising the step of, in response to verifying the indicia, delivering the package to the intended recipient in accordance with delivery information on the label.

148. The method of claim 146, wherein the machine readable indicia are optically scanned.

5 149. The method of claim 146, wherein the step of verifying is carried out at the point of acquisition of the package.

10 150. The method of claim 146, wherein the verifying device is a DIAD, and wherein the step of verifying is carried out at the point of acquisition of the package by display of information on the DIAD.

151. The method of claim 146, further comprising the steps of:

receiving an order from a customer of the shipping service provider via an Internet accessible computer system;

validating information received in the order;

in response to validating information received in the order, communicating the printer indicia to the Internet accessible computer system.

152. A method for shipping a package from a package sender to an intended recipient via a shipping service provider, wherein the shipping of the package is conducted according to profile information of a customer of the shipping service provider, comprising the steps of:

storing profile information associated with the customer in a computer system associated with the shipping service provider;

providing an Internet-accessible order-receiving system associated with the shipping service provider;

at the order-receiving system, receiving an order for shipping a package and identifying information from the customer via a computer system associated with the customer;

using the customer identifying information to retrieve profile information associated with the customer from the shipping service provider computer system;

determining a manner for handling the package to be shipped in accordance with the retrieved profile information;

transmitting information indicating the determined manner for handling the package to the customer's computer system for printing of a shipping label;

acquiring the package by the shipping service provider; and

handling the package in accordance with the information printed on the shipping label,

whereby the shipping of the package is conducted according to stored profile information associated with the customer.

153. The method of claim 152, wherein the profile information includes payment information, and further comprising the step of charging a customer for shipping the package in accordance with the stored payment information.

154. The method of claim 152, further comprising the step of billing the customer for shipping the package in accordance to payment information in the stored profile information.

155. The method of claim 152, further comprising the step of editing the stored profile information.

156. The method of claim 155, wherein the step of editing the stored profile information comprises the steps of:

retrieving the stored profile information in accordance with a command received from the customer's computer system;

changing the stored profile information in accordance with a command received from the customer's computer system.

157. The method of claim 152, wherein the step of storing profile information comprises:

displaying an Internet-based data entry form on the customer's computer system for entry of the profile information associated with the customer;

receiving entry into the data entry form by the customer of information relating to shipment handling and payment as profile information;

communicating the profile information to the computer system of the shipping service provider; and

storing the profile information at the computer system of the shipping service provider.

158. The method of claim 152, further comprising the steps of:

associating a unique customer identifier with the profile information;

in response to entry of the unique customer identifier by the customer when entering an order to ship a package, retrieving the profile information corresponding to the particular customer associated with the unique customer identifier.

159. The method of claim 152, wherein the stored profile information comprises:

a return address for the package to be returned to; and

a level of service designation determining how quickly the package is to be delivered.

160. The method of claim 152, wherein the profile information includes payment information designating the manner in which the shipping service provider will be paid for the service of shipping the package, and a rate associated with shipping the package corresponding to a particular customer.

161. The method of claim 152, wherein the order for shipping the package is entered via an Internet browser

window including shipping information data fields for receiving shipping information, and further comprising the step of prepopulating the data fields with retrieved profile information.

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162. The method of claim 152, wherein the label is printed at a computer system associated with the customer using the transmitted information.

163. A method for shipping a package from a package sender to an intended recipient via a shipping service provider, the package sender having an Internet-accessible computer system, comprising the steps of:

5 providing an Internet-accessible shipping computer system (ISS) associated with the shipping service provider, the ISS operative for receiving shipping information from a package sender via the package sender's computer system;

10 displaying a data entry form on the package sender's computer system for entry of shipping information by the package sender;

receiving shipping information entered by the package sender;

15 transmitting the shipping information from the package sender's computer system to the ISS via the Internet;

validating predetermined shipping information;

20 in response to validating the predetermined shipping information, communicating predetermined shipping label information for display on the package sender's computer system and printing of a customized shipping label; and

acquiring the package and associated customized shipping label for introduction into the shipping service provider's package handling system,

whereby the shipping service provider accepts and handles the package with the customized shipping label associated therewith in the same manner as a package having a preprinted shipping label.

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164. The method of claim 163, wherein the shipping information includes information selected from the group comprising: information relating to characteristics of with the package, information corresponding to the package sender, information relating to the intended recipient, information relating to payment for the shipping service, and information relating to a service type.

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165. The method of claim 163, further comprising the step of receiving identifying information from the package sender for verifying that the package sender is authorized to order service from the shipping service provider.

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166. The method of claim 165, further comprising the step of prepopulating selected data fields of the data entry form with information retrieved from the shipping computer system in response to the identifying information.

167. The method of claim 163, further comprising the steps of:

storing predetermined address information corresponding to one or more intended recipients in one or more entries in an address book stored on the package sender's computer system; and

populating selected data fields of the data entry form with information derived from the package sender's address book in response to selection of a particular entry in the address book.

168. The method of claim 163, wherein the step of validating predetermined shipping information comprises validating address information of the intended recipient, and wherein a postal code is employed for the address validation.

169. The method of claim 163, further comprising the step of determining a selected mode of entry of the package into the shipping service provider's package handling system.

170. The method of claim 169, wherein the step of determining the selected mode of entry of the package into the shipping service provider's package handling system

comprises customer selection of package dropoff at a dropoff location.

5 171. The method of claim 169, wherein the step of determining the selected mode of entry of the package into the shipping service provider's package handling system comprises customer selection of on demand pickup.

10 172. The method of claim 171, further comprising the step of automatically dispatching a package pickup to the package sender to pick up the package in response to a determination that on demand pickup of the package has been requested by the package sender.

15 173. The method of claim 163, further comprising the step of receiving selection of a payment method for shipping the package.

20 174. The method of claim 173, wherein the payment method comprises use of a predetermined account associated with the package sender.

with a credit of

176. A label for use with a package for handling by an automated package delivery system operated by a shipping service provider, the label being printable by commonly available printers associated with a personal computer system, comprising

a return address region for containing information corresponding to a return address of a package sender;

a ship to address region for containing information corresponding to a destination address of an intended recipient for the package;

a machine readable postal code region for containing the postal code of the destination address of the intended recipient for reading by optical scanning equipment operated the shipping service provider;

a machine readable tracking number region for containing a tracking number associated with the package in a machine readable format for reading by optical scanning equipment operated by the shipping service provider; and

authenticity indicia for enabling personnel of the shipping service provider to recognize that the label is authentic, the authenticity indicia comprising:

a billing prepaid indicator region for containing information indicating that the shipment service

provided by the shipping service provider has been prepaid; and

a predetermined identifying region for
containing identifying indicia associated with the shipping service
provider.

177. The label of claim 176, further comprising a
third machine readable encoded region for containing text of the
label and other package information in a form readable by an
optical scanning device operated by a person associated with the
shipping service provider.

178. The label of claim 176, further comprising a
human readable sort code region for containing information
relating to identification of a hub and sortation belt of automated
packaged handling equipment associated with the shipping
service provider.

179. The label of claim 176, further comprising a
level of service indicating region for containing information
corresponding to a selected level of service provided by the
shipping service provider for the package.

180. The label of claim 176, further comprising a number of packages region for containing information corresponding to the number of packages contained in a shipment of a plurality of packages.

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181. The label of claim 176, wherein the tracking number includes an indicium identifying the number as a tracking number, a customer account number, a level of service indicator corresponding to the level of service indicated in the level of service indicating region, and a predetermined reference number determined by the shipping service provider.

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182. The label of claim 176, wherein the customer account number includes payment indicia corresponding to a type of payment by a customer of the shipping service provider for shipment of the package.

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183. The label of claim 182, wherein the payment indicia corresponds to a pre-established account of the customer with the shipping service provider.

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184. The label of claim 182, wherein the payment indicia corresponds to a credit card payment.

185. The label of claim 176, wherein the label further includes a customer information region for containing information provided by the package sender.

186. The label of claim 176, wherein the label is printed using a print function associated with an Internet browser computer program on a personal computer operated by a customer of the shipping service provider.

187. The label of claim 186, wherein selected regions of the label include information displayed in an Internet browser computer program window opened when the package sender accesses an Internet-accessible computer shipping system operated by the shipping service provider.

188. The label of claim 186, wherein the browser computer window automatically formats a printer for landscape orientation for the label, which is folded in half to form a complete label, whereby the label is receivable in a standard plastic window for an adhesive plastic label provided by the shipping service provider.

189. The label of claim 186, wherein a computer system associated with the shipping service provider queries the customer's Internet accessible computer to determine a browser type and provides an appropriate page setup command to cause proper printing of the label for a determined type of browser.